

Brush

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Summary: It became something which came naturally to the two of them. Even when all other communication failed, the brush of fingers against hair was the one constant. It became a kind of a ritual. Every morning, Stoick did this, and every time he did, Hiccup woke up. Every time. Except once.

Brush

A/N: I've always wanted to write a story about the aftermath of the battle with the Green Death, and I have to say, I'm quite happy with how this turned out! I've seen similar stories, but this definitely has its own twist to it.

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><p>It was the simple moment father shared with son that reassured him that Hiccup was alive and well and real. The gentle brush of calloused fingers against thin strands of copper hair standing as a stark contrast to any other form of communication between the two.</p>

Stoick couldn't quite remember when the ritual started. He suspected it was some time after the departure Val, the third member of their small family, Hiccup's mother. Prior to her untimely death, she had always been the one to wake their son in the morning. Stoick hadn't considered the need to do such things until faced with the problem.

After Val, it became hard for Stoick to communicate with his son. He'd seen grieving families hold each other close, partaking in long hugs filled with tears and mourning. He didn't feel as if he could hug his son. The first reason being that it was too familiar, too similar to his lost love, and the second was plainly fear.

He became engrossed with fear. He found that losing a third of his

family made him contemplate more and more the pain of losing the remaining half. He hadn't realized before how small his son was, how fragile. A hug too strong could lead to broken bones or worse.

This same reason was causing the dilemma he faced the morning after his wife's funeral.

Hiccup was fast asleep, lying peacefully on his bed. Stoick could not, for the life of him, figure out how to wake him up. He considered all the traditional options, but none seemed suitable. A shake could be startling; after the trauma of the night, he did not wish to wake his son to a shockingly cruel world. A kiss on the forehead was far too sentimental and soft for any Viking chief of his caliber. A poke wouldn't cause a reaction any different from a shake, and he certainly wasn't going to trudge outside to fetch a pail of water.

He sighed. Was this what he would be reduced to in the absence of his wife? A big softy who's unable to even make decisions concerning his own child?

Stoick glanced down at the boy in question. The tear tracks from the night before had all but dried from his cheeks. The gentle rise and fall of his chest was comforting to Stoick, a fact that he questioned slightly, but did not bother dwelling on. The father was sure he would put on a good face for the village today, just as he always did. And that the village would ignore it, just as it always did. He was always like his mother in that sense, doing what was best for others even when they fail to notice.

Without really thinking about it, he reached down his hand to ruffle Hiccup's hair.

He watched his son's eyes blink open in the morning light, eventually focusing on the man above him. The child sat up and stretched, hopping out of bed and past his bewildered father with a simple "Morning!"

Every morning after that morning, he was woken up in the same way.

It became something that came naturally to the two of them. Even when all other communication failed, the brush of fingers against hair was the one constant. It became a kind of a ritual. Every morning, Stoick did this, and every time he did, Hiccup woke up. Every time.

Except once.

Stoick had killed dragons so fearsome that other Vikings had fell back in awe. He had leveled forests and tamed seas. He had done things most men could only imagine in nightmares. But watching the Green Death fall out of the sky in pursuit of his son was the most frightening thing Stoick had ever done.

In the aftermath of the great battle, there was a swell of emotions welling up inside him. Guilt, anger, sadness, and crippling fear. The short run into the smoke that surrounded the former battlefield was the longest of his life. He seemed to be running through molasses. It was as if he were running as fast as he could, but the whole world was moving slowly around him. His only thought was _Please please

please_.

Please be okay. Please Thor let him be okay. Please don't let it end like this._

He finally reached the endpoint of his journey. He fell to his knees in front of the motionless dragon and gnarled leather. Looking back, Stoick isn't sure what he would have done had that dragon not opened his wings and let air flow into the father's lungs again, but he supposes it doesn't really matter.

His first instinct, upon seeing his son, is to hold him close and never let him go again. (He realizes now how ridiculous that was, but it was there.) Clutching the Hiccup's limp form to his chest, he wants nothing more than to see those green eyes open again and tell him that everything's _fine, dad, stop worrying_. But the eyes don't open.

So Stoick does the only thing he can think to do. He brushes back his son's hair.

There is no reaction.

And Stoick's heart stops beating.

It is then that the father went into panic mode. He tossed his helmet to the side and presses his ear to the boy's thin chest, praying to whatever god will listen, _please please please_.

The weak heartbeat he hears seems to ward away all the tension in his body and he feels a relief unlike any other he's felt. His son is alive. Hiccup's alive.

The next few days are a blur of thankful villagers and Dragons, oh gods, Dragons. Dragons sunbathing, hunting, swimming, all in broad daylight with no fear. He doesn't know how they do it.

Following the battle, it was as if everything the small Viking tribe had previously known was blown to smithereens. Everything changed, everything, so it came as no surprise that the morning ritual between father and son did as well. Hiccup was more likely to wake up to the sounds of a certain Night Fury on the roof than anything else.

But, oddly enough, Stoick found he could live without their little constant. Maybe it was because he was watching his son become a man day by day, or maybe because he was no longer afraid to be more physical with his affection, (When it seemed as if your son could die on any given day, you learn to take the hugs you could get.) but for whatever reason, all the changes, the big and the brushes, were perfectly okay with the father. And he thinks, perhaps, that maybe it was because he is a father.

End
file.